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INFO RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000563

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2018

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SUBJECT: GREEK PM MAY RAISE ABKHAZIA/SOUTH OSSETIA WITH
PUTIN

REF: SECSTATE 40673

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES THOMAS COUNTRYMAN. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In separate meetings with Charge, MFA SecGen Agathocles and PM deputy diplomatic advisor Bitsios affirmed Greek support for Georgian sovereignty and the worrisome nature of the Kremlin's latest moves to establish "mechanisms" in dealing with Abkhazia and South Ossetia (reftel). Both also appeared ready to recommend that PM Karamanlis raise the issue with Putin in Moscow at the end of the month, particularly in light of the EU Presidency's declaration on the subject. They were skeptical about its impact, however, since Putin was unlikely to be able to see beyond comparisons with Kosovo. The main agenda item for Karamanlis's visit would be energy, though it was unclear whether a deal on South Stream would be signed. END SUMMARY.

CHARGE: GEORGIA SHOULD BE ON TOP OF PM'S MOSCOW AGENDA

12. (C) In his April 21 meeting with MFA Secretary General Agathocles, which was also attended by chief of the MFA A5 Directorate for CIS Affairs Ambassador Nikolaos Tsamados, Charge pushed forcefully for PM Karamanlis to discourage Russian President Putin from moving forward with implementing the Presidential Instructions on creating "mechanisms" for dealing with Russian citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia when the two leaders meet during Karamanlis's scheduled April 29 visit to Moscow. In delivering reftel points, Charge noted that Karamanlis was in a unique position to make the arguments to Putin due to the leaders' personal rapport, traditional Greek/Russian ties, and the fact that Karamanlis would be the first EU/NATO leader to see Putin since the instructions were issued. Charge noted Secretary Rice's call to Russian FM Lavrov on the issue and said discouraging the Kremlin from implementing the Abkhazia/South Ossetia instructions should be "at the top of Karamanlis's agenda" in Moscow.

13. (C) Agathocles noted that he had spoken to the Georgian ambassador on the subject and that Greece believed Georgia's latest offer on autonomy to Abkhazia was reasonable and a good step. He said Greece had stressed to Russia in their previous discussions on Georgia Greece's support for Georgia's sovereignty and that the "Russians don't like our blunt position." This time, however, Agathocles was unsure how seriously Putin would take a Greek intervention. Greece was supporting discussions on the matter at the EU and the issuing of the EU Presidency's declaration on Georgia of April 18 would provide Karamanlis with ammunition to use with Putin. Nevertheless, Agathocles said Putin was likely to

counter with strong references to Kosovo. Moreover, Agathocles believed Russia's latest steps were unlikely to lead to actual recognition of the rebellious regions by the Russian government and were Qntgst European countries, but Greece would work on strengthening coordination next year when it headed the OSCE. Charge countered that, all this notwithstanding, it was important for Putin to hear from Karamanlis Greece's -- and the EU's -- discouragement on issuing the instructions. Agathocles conceded the point, and in the end it appeared that the MFA would likely recommend the PM raise the issue with Putin in their meeting.

15. (C) Charge delivered a similar tough message to the PM's deputy diplomatic advisor Bitsios, adding that Russia's instructions on the rebellious regions set a bad precedent and would not be tolerated by any other sovereign state, including Russia, if directed at it. Charge said we hoped that the EU Presidency's declaration and a strong personal message by Karamanlis could make a difference with Putin. Bitsios responded that the instructions were "exactly what we were afraid of" when Kosovo made its UDI. He went on to argue similarly to Agathocles that Putin was likely to counter any Greek message with references to Kosovo. Like Agathocles, Bitsios appeared ready to advise PM Karamanlis to raise the issue with Putin but skeptical that it would have any impact.

ENERGY ISSUES

16. (C) Both Agathocles and Bitsios said the primary agenda

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item for Karamanlis's visit to Moscow was energy. Agathocles noted standard Greek concerns about getting enough Azeri gas to fill TGI and argued that Nabucco and South Stream were not competitive. In any case, Tsamados argued, we should not get "too spun up" on the gas deals since the amounts of money involved paled in comparison to the write-downs that Wall Street firms were taking on the credit crisis in the States. Bitsios, contrary to press reports, said he did not know whether Greece would sign a deal on energy in Moscow at the end of the month. There were on-going discussions but "we're not there yet." Nevertheless, Bitsios was adamant in noting Greece's great need for gas. The country lacked its own resources and would run out in five years if it didn't make some kind of deal -- whether with the Russians or some other party -- now. "We have no choice," he argued, "we need gas wherever we can find it."

COUNTRYMAN